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Women's Economic Security and Pay Equity

A Discussion Paper

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Ministry of Women's Equality

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the B.C. government has worked with women, employers, unions, cooperatives, and community groups to implement economic policies and social programs aimed at achieving economic equality for women. Funding for programs specifically targeted for women has more than doubled from about $300 million in 1991 to $700 million in 1999.

A wide variety of income support programs assist women, including low-income wage supplements and minimum income supplements for seniors. Minimum wage increases and the advancement of pay equity in the public sector have helped provide better wages for women who do some of the most important and least-valued work in our communities.

Other provincial government programs help reduce violence against women, support children and families, and improve women's health. Over the past three years, B.C.'s student financial assistance (SFA) policies were adjusted to increase support for married and single women pursuing more education. In addition, the Industry, Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) has initiated a number of projects to increase the representation of women and other equity groups in apprenticeship.

Notwithstanding a number of economic advances women have made in the past decade, progress in many areas has been modest and women's participation in the workforce is too often characterized by lower pay and fewer occupational opportunities. The gap between the wages of men and women remains entrenched, and women shoulder more family and household responsibilities, including child care, caring for elderly family members and household chores.

This paper reviews women's changing role in the labour market, the challenges of balancing work and family, and the factors that explain women's relative economic disadvantage. It presents additional government initiatives and proposals to help advance economic security for all women. It seeks to challenge government, municipalities, businesses and cooperatives, community economic organizations, unions and individuals to take action.

The B.C. Government's Women's Economic Strategy is organized under four themes:

Theme I: Closing the Wage Gap;
Theme II: Closing the Poverty Gap;
Theme III: Supporting Women, Children and Families;
Theme IV: Increasing Women's Representation in Positions of Influence.

This discussion paper is the continuation of a dialogue that has produced effective government action on women's equality. Now entering its second decade, Canada's only stand-alone ministry remains dedicated to advancing the social and economic status of women and will continue to offer tangible help to women in the workplace. We want to hear what you believe must be done to meet the challenge of achieving women's economic equality.

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

During the past 100 years, one of the most significant changes for both the Canadian job market and the Canadian household has undoubtedly been the massive entry of women into the paid labour force. From 1901 to 1951, women's participation rate in the paid labour force doubled from 12 per cent to 24 per cent.[1] As of 1999, six out of ten Canadian women participate in the paid labour force. Younger women participate at an even higher rate, with eight out of ten women aged 25-44 in the labour force.[2]

Canada's service sector has shown significant growth and, while it remains an area of high employment for women, many of those jobs have been at or near minimum wage.

Equality of opportunity means lowering the barriers to employment and economic participation. It allows individuals to realize their full potential and enhances B.C.'s prosperity. Women's participation in all aspects of society can be mirrored across economic sectors and occupations, with significant benefit to our economy and to women, their children, and their families.

Economic security for women benefits the economy and society. It opens the window of opportunity for women and provides choices on health care, education, child care, housing, and employment.

This discussion of women's opportunities outside of female-dominated occupations comes during rapid change in the tools of the workplace and the application of knowledge and innovation. Women can prepare for and take their place in emerging economic sectors or the economy can continue to pay the price of women's exclusion from economic growth: lower employment, reduced demand, dependency and family poverty.

GENDER WAGE GAP

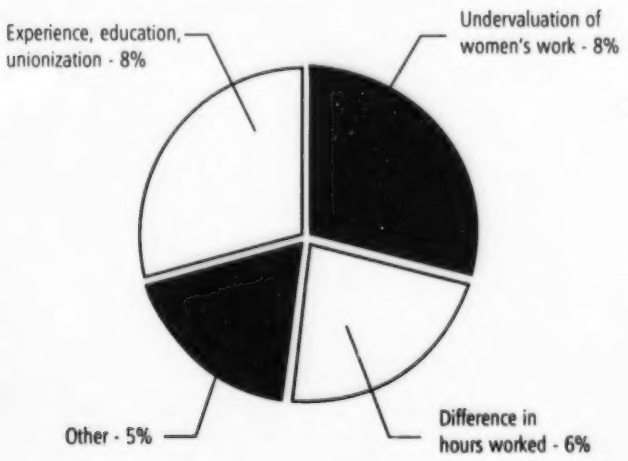
In 1997, women working full-time, full-year in B.C. earned an estimated average of $32,849 or 72.9 per cent of men's earnings.[3] The difference is known as the "gender wage gap," which, at only 11 percentage points narrower since 1981, has not closed enough over the past two decades.

FEMALE TO MALE EARNINGS RATIO FOR FULL-YEAR, FULL-TIME WORKERS BY PROVINCE (1990 - 1997) [4]

PROVINCE	YEAR							
	1990	**1991**	**1992**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**
Newfoundland	72.0%	72.9%	68.7%	70.3%	68.7%	67.1%	72.2%	70.5%
Prince Edward Island	79.4%	81.2%	79.6%	83.2%	77.5%	77.3%	77.3%	80.2%
Nova Scotia	72.1%	65.8%	66.6%	65.1%	72.4%	71.5%	72.5%	71.0%
New Brunswick	65.8%	65.4%	69.7%	61.7%	63.9%	65.3%	68.8%	69.8%
Quebec	68.8%	70.0%	73.9%	73.9%	70.0%	74.8%	75.7%	74.7%
Ontario	66.2%	69.9%	72.0%	74.1%	69.6%	73.7%	73.7%	73.1%
Manitoba	72.0%	75.1%	70.9%	75.8%	73.7%	70.4%	74.9%	73.3%
Saskatchewan	75.9%	69.2%	71.0%	76.5%	69.3%	71.7%	70.0%	73.3%
Alberta	66.9%	64.4%	70.2%	68.4%	68.9%	70.3%	67.5%	64.2%
British Columbia	66.8%	70.5%	70.2%	67.0%	69.5%	73.2%	73.8%	72.9%
Canada	67.7%	69.6%	71.9%	72.2%	69.8%	73.1%	73.4%	72.5%
British Columbia Ranking*	7	3	5	7	5	3	3	5

* Number of provinces in which women make a higher proportion of men's earnings than women do in B.C.

COMPONENTS OF THE 27% WAGE GAP



Research shows that about half of the overall gender wage gap can be accounted for by differences between men and women in certain wage-determining factors.[5] Higher education, for example, can substantially reduce the wage gap. For every $1 earned by a man, women with a university education earned 84 cents, while women with less than a high school diploma earned only 69 cents for every dollar earned by a man. [6] Other wage-determining factors include work experience, job responsibility, training, tenure, labour market attachment and length of time in the work force.

The other half of the wage gap is generally considered to stem from discrimination.[7] Between one-quarter and one-third of this portion of the wage gap is attributed to the historic undervaluation of work traditionally done by women.[8] For example, the average salary for janitors is $22,000 while the average salary for child-care workers is $18,000. The gap in wages is found across all occupations and sectors. Women earn consistently less than their male counterparts.

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COMPARISON OF WOMEN'S AND MEN'S EARNINGS BY WOMEN'S FIVE HIGHEST-PAYING OCCUPATIONS AND WOMEN'S FIVE LOWEST-PAYING OCCUPATIONS, 1995[9]

LOWEST-PAYING OCCUPATIONS FOR WOMEN, 1995	Women's Average Earnings	Men's Average Earnings
Babysitters, Nannies & Parents' Helpers	$12,662	$15,106
Artisans & Craftspersons	13,565	20,555
General Farm Workers	13,825	19,990
Food & Beverage Servers	13,861	18,192
Harvesting Labourers	14,465	18,683
HIGHEST-PAYING OCCUPATIONS FOR WOMEN, 1995	**Women's Average Earnings**	**Men's Average Earnings**
Judges	$117,707	$128,791
Specialist Physicians	86,086	137,019
General Practitioners & Family Physicians	81,512	116,750
Dentists	71,587	109,187
Sr. Managers - Financial, Communications Carriers & other Business Services	71,270	104,715

LABOUR MARKET SEGREGATION

Another major reason for the gender wage gap is that most women have been concentrated in a narrow range of occupations. The top three occupations for women are sales and service (35 per cent), business, finance and administrative (30 per cent) and social science, education, government service and religion (9 per cent). By comparison, the top three occupations for men are trades, transport and equipment operators and related (26 per cent), sales and service (21 per cent) and management (12 per cent).[10]

Women remain under-represented in engineering and the physical sciences, where pay is more lucrative. In emerging fields such as computer science, only 14 per cent of the high tech labour force is made up of women (1996).[11]

With the exception of a handful of female-dominated occupations, women have had only modest success at breaking into apprenticeable trades. Moreover, women tend to enter trades training later in life, giving them less time to reach the highest wage scale. In 1999, seven per cent of registered apprentices in B.C. were women, up from five per cent in 1998. Of the 138 post-secondary trades training programs in B.C., half had no women enrolled.[12]

SELF-EMPLOYMENT & SMALL BUSINESS

One of the key growth areas for women in the B.C. labour market is self-employment and small business. In 1984, only 31 per cent of women were self-employed, compared to 36 per cent in 1999.[13] While opportunities for greater independence are a likely draw for women, self-employment is not necessarily lucrative for many of them. Women are generally sole owner-operators in traditionally female-dominated services such as housecleaning, office services, and personal services. In fact, nearly three-quarters of self-employed B.C. women earn $18,000 a year on average.

Although there have been advances for women who own businesses, the overall representation of women in this segment of the economy remains modest. Women employers made up three per cent of the labour force in 1998.[14]

WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Balancing work and family is an ongoing challenge for many women. Research from the early 1990s reveals that 47 per cent of women who temporarily left the labour force did so for family-related reasons.

One of the adaptations some women make to balance work and family is to work part-time or to chose irregular work schedules. Women are almost three times as likely to work part-time as men. Almost 40 per cent of single mothers with pre-school children would like to have more hours of paid work. While many women cite lack of access to child care as a reason for not participating more in the paid labour force, many are simply unable to secure adequate hours of work.

Women's family responsibilities create a double workday - a combination of paid and unpaid work. That unpaid work includes household maintenance, child care, care for other dependent family members such as the elderly and those with disabilities, and volunteer work in the community. In the early 1990s, regardless of marital status or the presence of children, women spent 90 minutes more per day on unpaid work than men. [15]

The following sections provide a discussion on women in the paid workforce built around four key themes of economic security. Within each theme, we've provided information regarding possible actions that may be considered to address the issue. Government cannot do it alone. The participation of municipalities, unions, businesses and cooperatives, and community economic development organizations is required.

We invite you to respond to the questions in each section. And we welcome your additional suggestions on what we should be doing inside government and in partnership with workers, employers and organizations to help achieve economic security for women.

Theme I: Closing the Wage Gap

The key to women's economic equality is closing the gender wage gap. The government of B.C. has developed initiatives to help close that gap, ensure women are fairly compensated for their work and help open avenues to new occupations. These initiatives are aimed at expanding the occupational choices available to women, accurately valuing and compensating women's work, and ensuring that the working environment is supportive and conducive to women.

The government of B.C. is developing a Women's Workplace Equity Office (WWEO) with a wide range of responsibilities, including working with communities, the private sector and municipal governments on issues concerning women's economic equality. The WWEO will work to help develop the women's economic equality initiatives that B.C. women identify for action.

The government of B.C. would like to build on its success in the public sector. An early focus on community outreach and public education strategies would help inform municipalities, the private sector and trade unions about the benefits of recognizing women's contribution to the workplace. The WWEO information would focus on helping business and others to develop pay equity and diversity programs in their workforce and on preparing employer and workplace training and materials aimed at reducing sexual harassment.

PAY EQUITY

Pay equity, or equal pay for work of equal value, is aimed at rectifying the historical under-valuation of women's work. It is estimated that pay equity can close about one-third of the portion of the wage gap that arises from discrimination. The government of B.C. has already implemented a range of initiatives that promote equal pay for work of equal value and is committed to exploring a range of options for implementing pay equity with the private sector and municipalities.

The concept of pay equity is not new. The International Labour Organization's convention supporting equal pay for work of equal value was passed in 1951. The federal government and the governments of Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia all have some form of legislation that calls for equal pay for work of equal value. Only the federal government, Ontario and Quebec have pay equity in the private sector. B.C. and Saskatchewan have policy-based pay equity, while Newfoundland has no pay equity policy or legislation.

B.C.'s pay equity policy covers provincial government employees in the direct public service and health, education and social service workers in the broader public sector. While there is no legal authority to enforce this policy, compliance is achieved through financial incentives or penalties. This is successful when the parties involved are committed to achieving pay equity.

COMPARISON OF PAY EQUITY IN CANADIAN JURISDICTIONS

JURISDICTION	LEGISLATION	AGENCY	MODEL
Federal	*Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985,* first introduced, 1975	Canadian Human Rights Commission	Complaint based
Manitoba	*Pay Equity Act,* 1985-86	Pay Equity Bureau disbanded 1994	
New Brunswick	*Pay Equity Act,* S.N.B. 1989	Pay Equity Bureau	Proactive
Newfoundland	No pay equity legislation	Treasury Board Secretariat	Collective Agreement
Northwest Territories	*Fair Practices Act,*1988	Fair Practices Officer	Complaint-based
Nova Scotia	*Pay Equity Act,* 1989	Pay Equity Commission	Proactive
Ontario	*Pay Equity Act,* 1990	Pay Equity Commission	Proactive
Prince Edward Island	*Pay Equity Act,* 1988	Pay Equity Bureau	Integrated Model (proactive and complaint based)
Quebec	*Pay Equity Act,* 1997	Pay Equity Commission	Proactive, phase in 2001-2005
Yukon Territory	*Yukon Human Rights Act,* 1987	Yukon Human Rights	Complaint-based
Nunavut	No pay equity legislation		
British Columbia	Pay Equity Policy Framework and Sectoral Guidelines. Low Wage Redress Initiative	Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat	
Alberta	No pay equity legislation		
Saskatchewan	Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value and Pay Equity Policy Framework. No pay equity legislation	Women's Directorate	

B.C.'s pay equity policy has been very successful in the public sector. The British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) and Professional Employees Association employees have completed pay equity implementation. In the broader public sector - universities, colleges, health facilities, public schools and crown corporations - 90 per cent of the target employers have completed plans.

As of January 2000, the female to male earning ratio among regular full-time public service employees was approximately 88 per cent, up from an estimated 81 per cent prior to pay equity. In the education sectors, the female-male wage ratio within support staff bargaining units currently ranges from 85 per cent to 95 per cent. In March 2000, the ratio in the health care sector - both acute and long-term care - was estimated to be approximately 97 per cent, a significant increase from approximately 86 per cent prior to the implementation of pay equity.

There is a range of models that could be considered for extending pay equity beyond the public sector. Voluntary compliance would be a variation on the province's policy-based model. Another model would be to have pay equity as a component of contract compliance for companies doing business with the provincial government. A third option would be to introduce either proactive or complaint-based legislation.

VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE

One option for implementing pay equity in the private sector and for local governments is through voluntary compliance. A core activity of the proposed WWEO will be to help employers develop and implement equity plans. Employers demonstrating that they have voluntarily engaged in bona fide efforts would be eligible for suitable incentives. The government will work with employers and representatives of employees to determine what some of the most effective incentives could be.

CONTRACT COMPLIANCE

Another option being evaluated by government for implementing pay equity and employment equity is contract compliance. The first step in assessing whether contract compliance would be viable is to collect data regarding existing government contracts. This model would require companies with more than a specified number of staff to agree to pay equity, employment equity and prevention of sexual harassment, as a condition of their bid on government contracts over a certain value.

LEGISLATIVE APPROACH

A legislative approach would require employers to have pay equity. The legislation can be proactive or complaint-driven, and would be applied to specific sectors. This can include the public service, the broader public sector, municipalities and the private sector. Under a complaint-driven legislative model, an individual or group of individuals must file a complaint alleging pay discrimination to begin the process of achieving pay equity. In a proactive legislative model, there is a legal requirement for employers to take positive measures to ensure that pay equity has or will be achieved within the workforce.

LOW WAGE REDRESS

Low wage redress is the policy of using collective bargaining to redress the historically low wages of workers, predominantly women, who provide some of the most important services in our communities. This policy could be a simple and effective model for improving women's wages, particularly for women at the low end of the wage spectrum. The provincial government has used this method to improve salaries for women in the community and social services sector. In this sector, wages for residential care workers have been increased from $10/hour in 1991 to $16/hour in 1999 - the highest in Canada. Employers could set aside a modest figure, such as one per cent of payroll to top up wages in the lowest paid female dominated job classes. Employers could work with unions or employee committees to identify the appropriate female dominated job classes. This would have the effect of benefiting women at the lowest end of the spectrum, without generating any new administrative processes.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Reducing the gender wage gap also depends on ending job segregation and ensuring that all types and levels of occupations are open to women. Employment equity also fosters the best in human resources practices, as it removes systemic barriers to employment and expands the available pool of qualified candidates for jobs.

The government of B.C. will be asking businesses to implement employment equity on a voluntary basis. Government will be offering supports to business to develop employment equity programs, including information about implementing employment equity, access to data to establish hiring goals, information about removing systemic barriers and strategies to accelerate advancement for women. The government's requests for proposals and contracts with service providers could contain specific language and performance requirements regarding women's access to jobs. Employers who demonstrate that they have engaged voluntarily in bona fide efforts could be given incentives.

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Workplace sexual harassment is a factor that may impact women's economic well-being. A woman may choose to avoid considering training and employment in a certain occupation or industry perceived to be resistant to women's employment. Or, a woman may choose to leave her job, preferring not to continue in a "poisoned environment". Sexual harassment may be a barrier to opportunities for advancement and promotion.

The B.C. Human Rights Commission has made available extensive information on their web site that can be useful to employers, employees, and the general public in addressing sexual harassment. Given the importance of an appropriate working environment to women's economic success, one avenue the WWEO could pursue is to work with the Human Rights Commission on training for employers and employees regarding prevention of sexual harassment.

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Assisting women to enter well paying apprenticeable trades where they have been under-represented is a component of employment equity. The WWEO could work with the Industry, Training and Apprenticeship Commission on pilot projects to help young women enter non-traditional trades that offer the best opportunities for success.

BURSARIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

Providing bursaries to encourage women to pursue post-secondary education in non-traditional, higher paying sectors will also contribute to the overall objective of employment equity for women. The Ministry of Women's Equality provides educational bursaries and scholarships for women, improving access to education and job training in nontraditional areas.

CREATING CRITICAL LINKAGES TO COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The government of B.C. is working to help give communities the tools they need to develop their local economies. The recently-created Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers is responding to adjustment needs of communities facing industry downturns. The ministry's community economic development initiatives can increase women's economic influence at the local level: including in the development of community adjustment plans and providing assistance for new community adjustment agreements. Part of the criteria for economic development seed funding could include addressing women's employment needs.

The WWEO will explore ways of participating in community adjustment and economic development programs to ensure that women's interests are fully represented in any community economic development agreements. It will also work to ensure that training and re-training in industries/sectors undergoing restructuring meets the needs of all women.

WOMEN AND SMALL BUSINESS

Women represent almost 40 per cent of small business owners. The Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture could work with the WWEO in developing materials targeted towards the specific needs of women entrepreneurs and sole operators. A key focus of the work is expanding the growth of women's small businesses.

The WWEO could also work in cooperation with the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture to assist small business with equity projects. For example, assistance could be provided on how small business could initiate the best in human resources practices, to ensure employment equity and pay equity as small businesses expand.

QUESTIONS

1. Which pay equity model (voluntary, contract compliance, legislated) do you consider to be most effective? Why?
2. If you prefer a legislated model, do you support complaints-based or proactive legislation?
3. What types of supports/services could government provide to businesses and municipalities to support voluntary implementation of pay equity?
4. What types of services could government provide to businesses to support voluntary implementation of employment equity and prevention of sexual harassment training?
5. What other strategies would you suggest to encourage women to enter occupations where they have not traditionally been represented?
6. Would low wage redress (where employers would be required to direct one per cent of their payroll to increasing the salaries of their lowest paid workers) be an effective way to reduce the wage gap?
7. What other initiatives would you propose to support closing the wage gap?
8. What other initiatives would you propose particularly for young women? older women? women with disabilities? women members of visible minority groups? aboriginal women?

Theme II: Closing the Poverty Gap

The consequence of women's economic inequality in the labour force is that poverty is predominantly a women's problem. Twenty three per cent of Canadian families with children at home are single-parent families headed by women. They have the lowest incomes of all family types in Canada.[16] In 1995, 52 per cent of single-parent families led by women fell below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) line, indicating that they are significantly worse off than the average.[17]

When women are poor in their younger years, they are often more dependent on government transfers in senior years.[18] In 1997, the average income of B.C. women over 65 years was $17,382, compared to $27,961 for men.[19] The government of B.C. is committed to closing that gap. Eliminating poverty is an ongoing concern being addressed by government and will require continued and dedicated effort over the long term.

MINIMUM WAGE

There are about 60,000 people in British Columbia who work at minimum wage. Overall, women account for 59 per cent of these individuals, and for people over the age of 25, 70 per cent. The Government of B.C. has raised the minimum wage from $5.50 in 1992 to its current level of $7.15 per hour, the highest level of any Canadian province. Raises to the minimum wage benefit women in particular, and could form a component of government's strategy to reduce poverty for women.

FAMILY MAINTENANCE ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

It is a problem for many women receiving maintenance support that their payments from their former partners are in arrears. The Ministry of Attorney General Family Maintenance Enforcement Program was established in 1988 to assist recipient spouses with maintenance enforcement. The program is optional and can be used by either the payor spouse or the recipient. The program enrolls and enforces maintenance orders and registered agreements that require individuals to provide continuing support to their families. One suggestion is that immediately upon a maintenance order being issued by the court, enrollment in Family Maintenance Enforcement Program would take place. This would speed up enrollment in the program and expedite potential enforcement action and ensure that women and their families have no disruption in the income they are entitled to. There would be an option for women to opt out of this program if, for example, they had left a violent relationship and believed that participation in the program would increase the risk of violence.

BC FAMILY BONUS

The BC Family Bonus has been providing a monthly benefit to all lower income families with children since 1996. One report estimated that, within six months of the program launch, the BC Family Bonus had reduced the poverty gap by an estimated 19 per cent for all working poor families and by 25.5 per cent for single parent families among the working poor. As of October 1999, 24,000 fewer families comprising nearly 44,000 children were on welfare — a reduction of roughly one-third in the number of families and children on welfare in three years.

The success of the BC Family Bonus was a key factor in the creation of the National Child Benefit, Canada's first new national social program in a generation. B.C. gave more than $860 million in benefits to low- to-modest-income families between 1996 and 1998, as part of a comprehensive effort to reduce child poverty. The B.C. government could explore ways of building on the success of this program, either on its own or in cooperation with the federal government.

JOB TRAINING

The B.C. government could expand education and job training programs for women who are single parents, women returning to the workforce, and older women. This program could provide skills training and employment to women on low incomes in inner city communities, where the greatest concentration of poverty exists. It could also provide bridges to employment for women who are at risk, homeless, victims of abuse, or who have substance abuse problems.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the potential initiatives identified in this section of the document would you support?
2. Do you think raising the minimum wage would be an effective strategy for reducing the poverty gap?
3. Are there any other enhancements to the BC Family Bonus Program that you would support?
4. Do you think automatically registering maintenance orders under the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program would be an effective way of ensuring that families receive their maintenance payments?
5. What initiatives would you propose to reduce the poverty gap for women facing multiple barriers (e.g., women with disabilities, women members of visible minority groups, aboriginal women)?
6. What other initiatives would you propose to support closing the poverty gap?

Theme III: Supporting Women, Children And Families

Even though most women work in the paid labour force, they are more likely to have primary responsibility for both child care and elder care. Society must recognize the contribution women make to the workforce and in raising children for the future. The government of B.C. is considering a range of initiatives to help working parents, recognizing and valuing the many roles that women carry.

CHILD CARE

Before and after school care is a challenge for many families. This is particularly true for those headed by single parents, 83 per cent of whom are women. Access to safe quality child care is a key factor in women's ability to build economic equality for themselves and for their families. The B.C. government has recently announced enhanced support for child care. Publicly funded care for children from Grade 1 to age 12 will be available before- and after-school for $7 a day starting January 2001. The fee will apply to 19,000 children who attend 800 licenced child-care facilities for before- and after-school care during the school year. The service will also be available during school vacations — at Christmas, spring break, and during professional development days — for a fee of $14. The B.C. Government could explore options for expanding publicly funded child care including developing cooperative initiatives with the federal government.

MATERNITY BENEFITS

The federal Employment Insurance Act provides maternity leave to an employee for up to 15 weeks through maternity leave, with an additional 10 weeks for parental leave after a two-week unpaid waiting period. The cash benefit of this leave amounts to a maximum of 55 per cent of the employee's salary, to a top rate of $413/week.

The 1999 federal Throne Speech recognized that some of the surplus in the Employment Insurance Fund could be used to improve maternity and parental benefits, primarily by extending benefit periods. B.C. could amend the *Employment Standards Act* to dovetail with these proposed changes, giving employees a corresponding amount of time for maternity and parental leave, 52 weeks in total.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES

The WWOE, in partnership with business and labour, could develop and disseminate a profile of "best practices" in flexible private-sector and municipal organizations, building on the Public Service Employee Relations Commission's work identifying "best practices" in flexible public sector work arrangements.

Initiatives aimed at creating family-friendly workplaces were outlined in the *Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids* discussion paper. Options identified included:

- promoting flexible hours, job sharing and opportunities for working at home/telecommuting;
- expanded leave days to organize alternative care arrangements for children or caring for sick children;
- purchasing community child-care services such as resource and referral services and emergency child-care services for employee use.

QUESTIONS

1. Would you support expanding the new before- and after-school care program to younger children and other licenced spaces?
2. What other initiatives would you propose to support women, children and families?
3. Given that eldercare is increasingly a matter of concern, are there any initiatives you would propose to support women who have eldercare responsibilities?
4. Are there any suggestions you would make to support women with other challenges to balancing work and family?

Theme IV: Increasing Women's Influence

A key measure of women's equality is the opportunity to fully participate in society's major decisions, whether they are made by government or in the private sector. Women have made progress in this over the last 30 years. Many barriers have been removed, injustices have diminished and women's representation in positions of influence has increased. However, women's access to decision-making structures and processes remains a challenge, particularly in some sectors.

In the B.C. public service, more than one-third of deputy ministers are women, and women make up 46 per cent of appointees to provincial government agencies, boards and commissions. Women's representation on health authorities is even better, at slightly over 50 per cent.

Women are senior members of the education system, but not in numbers great enough to be the life role models for young women that they could be. Only a quarter of university educators and 40 per cent of school vice-principals are women.

Women's representation at decision-making levels is lowest in the private sector. Women comprise only four per cent of members of boards of directors in B.C.'s leading companies.

The Conference Board of Canada identifies women's advancement to managerial positions as a business advantage. In an increasingly competitive global market, there is a strong business case for ensuring gender and cultural diversity in management positions and increasing sensitivity to the diversity of consumers and clients.

WORKING GROUP OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

A working group of business and labour from a range of B.C. companies could be brought together. This working group would make recommendations to employers on how to increase the representation of women in their senior ranks and would profile the benefits of increased diversity in management.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE

The first annual Roundtable on Women's Economic Equality will be held in September 2000, co-chaired by Premier Ujjal Dosanjh and Minister of Women's Equality Joan Smallwood. Participants will include representatives of equality-seeking organizations, economists and other academics, businesses, unions, municipalities, government policy-makers and women from across B.C. Part of the Roundtable will be devoted to issues of concern for aboriginal women, visible minority women, and women with disabilities.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the potential initiatives identified in this section of the document would you support?
2. Would it be effective to establish a working group of business and labour, representing a range of B.C. companies, to make recommendations to employers on how to increase the representation of women in their senior ranks and profile the benefits of increased diversity in management?
3. Would mentorship and networking initiatives be effective ways for women to help other women enhance their influence and obtain decision-making positions?
4. What other initiatives would you propose to increase women's influence?
5. What other initiatives would you propose that would support young women, older women, women in rural communities, women members of visible minority groups, aboriginal women and women with disabilities?

Next Steps

This government is committed to achieving economic equality for women and is taking action toward this objective. We will be holding further consultations with women across B.C., including women from rural areas. The September 2000 Roundtable will be an opportunity to discuss our strategies with women of the province and leaders from business, labour and municipalities.

Over the short term, we will be continuing work on the development of the Women's Workplace Equity Office.

Please provide your comments, identifying the organization which you represent, by August 7, 2000. While no direct response will be provided to your submission, when we have consolidated the feedback, a follow-up paper will be released.

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